

Dad took me with him to get Uncle Max even though my mother thought I was too young. I had never seen the inside of a motel room before. There was a bed with the sheets piled in the middle like the last of a snowman. There were bottles all over and boxes of Pangburns.

Max went back to Iris and his yard full of cars, but he wasn't worth a damn. He had lost his touch and his business amounted to nothing but oil changes and inner tubes.

My father had to give them money to make ends meet and once when he came back from there my mother said it was a shame what had happened to Max, how he had married that good for nothing Iris and made a fool of himself to boot.

My father put the paper down. He said she should drop the subject. Hadn't she done enough? Wasn't she satisfied? By God, he never wanted to hear another word about it, not ever.

He froze the room. He had never shouted in his life except for one other time when I came back from baseball. I had won the game and I said what a nice little town this was and that maybe I would just stay here forever.

## HOMETOWN

I don't go back much and when I do I don't get around. There's a little race track at the foot of the bluff, I watch some t.v and maybe for the

first time listen to my father who was beaten til the white showed, and my mother whose feet would have frozen if she hadn't stood where the cows had slept.

This house sits where those cows used to lie and I ask why they didn't just leave. "Roots, I guess. Nowadays you don't see it. Maybe that's good."

Occasionally I run into somebody down at the liquor store. We eye each other over the Ace combs and nail clippers and finally decide that under the hair or behind the gut is part of the class of '59. Last time it was a girl named Marti.

"Hey, remember when I wouldn't go out with you in eighth grade because you tried to french me at Shirley Willoughby's house? I was worried about my reputation."

"You were probably wise. My tongue was wanted in a dozen states for various atrocities."

"Look," she said, "if you want to come over tonight there won't be anybody home after say 11:00. Ted's working graveyard."

"I can't. I'd like to but I can't. I'm leaving for L.A. tonight." She nodded, gave a little tug at her wig.

"Well," she said, "I wish I was."

#### MY GRANDMOTHER

was always old so when I saw her at the nursing home she just seemed more faint.

She was balsa in a white gown, stained at the center. She called me Bill and my father answered.

When she slept she moved her feet like a lifer. Awake, she roamed the past, a historian.

My father and I looked at each other, shook our heads, watched t.v.

It was football season; the game was half done. On the field in Stetsons and tasseled boots cowgirls from Dallas showed their silken crotches to the world.

Going home we were on a two-lane suicide road. He was driving fast through dark as thick as earth. "That wasn't her," he said putting his right hand over his heart like a man at a parade.